**Reading the Holy Week story with Covid -19 eyes**

1. **The woman with her precious ointment.**

Read John 12:1-11 (the set reading for Monday of Holy Week)

*1Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” 9When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.* (New Revised Standard Version)

If this woman were offering her precious gift today, she would probably be presenting Jesus with a large bottle of antibacterial hand gel! Judas would criticize her for not selling it on e-Bay for a much higher price than she had bought it for. Others would be angry about her selfish stockpiling and would want to know whether she also had toilet paper or pasta hidden away in a secret stash somewhere.

Jesus recognised that she was giving him in advance the loving physical touch that she would want to offer as he died or when he was buried. The Covid-19 social distancing rules would prevent her from being present at his death and at his funeral.

What can you offer someone today that you might not be able to offer tomorrow?

Pray these words by reading or singing them:

***Take my love; my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.***

***Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee****.*

If you have internet, you can click on this link for a meditative version of the other verses.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QubPnYFavY>

1. **The man who washed his hands**

Read Matthew 27:15-26

*15Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, ‘Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ 18For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. 19While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.’ 20Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21The governor again said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ And they said, ‘Barabbas.’ 22Pilate said to them, ‘Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ All of them said, ‘Let him be crucified!’ 23Then he asked, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Let him be crucified!’ 24So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ 25Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ 26So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.*  (New Revised Standard Version)

We all know how important it is to wash our hands frequently to prevent infection, but did you know that saying the Lord’s Prayer takes the same amount of time as singing “Happy Birthday to you” twice?!

Pilate washes his hands to show that he is not responsible for the death of Jesus. We still use the phrase “to wash our hands of someone or something” today when we want to reject or deny our involvement.

When have you washed your hands of someone or something?

What sins do you need Jesus to wash away this Holy Week?

You might like to read Psalm 51.

If you have internet you can watch this beautiful musical setting of it

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcWo1hKHu40>

You could also watch this recording of Judi Dench washing her hands as she plays Lady Macbeth, deeply troubled by her involvement in the assassination of King Duncan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dgbbtUbgcM>

1. **The people who stood at a distance**

Read Luke 23:44-49

*44It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. 47When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ 48And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. 49But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

(New Revised Standard Version)

Social distancing at the crucifixion….

There are a number of reasons why Jesus’ acquaintances might have stood at distance….

It was too painful to watch from close up….

They were fearful of being associated with him….

Women were always at the back of the crowd….

How close to the cross are you standing?

What can you see from where you are? What can you hear?

Who is standing with you? Who is standing at a distance from you?

Romans 8:35-39 feels particularly appropriate for funerals at the moment as even the few who are able to be present have to sit two metres apart. Perhaps there is someone you could share these words with this week?

*35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (New Revised Standard Version)

If you have internet you might like to listen to the Taizé chant based on this passage. It is sung in different languages - reminding us that people around the world are standing together at the foot of the cross this week.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qb4GZv8I0f8>